

State funds will begin to air-condition Kihei School

By BRIAN PERRY, Assistant City Editor

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KIHEI – Gov. Linda Lingle has released \$1 million for the design and construction of an air-conditioning system at Kihei Elementary School.

The money will be added to \$1.45 million released by Lingle last year, and the \$2.45 million will cover the total cost of the first phase of construction.

Overall, plans call for installing air conditioning in the school's permanent classrooms – buildings A through F – and in 12 portable classrooms, according to the Governor's Office.

The state project comes after years of lobbying by South Maui residents and the Kihei Parent Teachers Association for the air conditioning. School fundraising events were held to buy air-conditioning units and ceiling fans. Nevertheless, the problem of stifling hot classrooms persists.

"It's Kihei. We're always hot," said Tehani Kama, parent facilitator for the school's parent-community networking center.

Kama said she sympathizes with the students, who don't complain that much.

"But we know that they are hot. They just deal with it," she said.

Kama said Lingle came to the school last year to say the project to install air conditioning had been approved.

"We've been waiting for it," Kama said.

The governor said the time for waiting is coming to an end.

"It's time the state stepped in to help," Lingle said. "This project is a priority, so we're very pleased to be able to provide the funds needed to ensure our students and teachers have a comfortable environment where they can focus on learning."

The governor pointed out that the air-conditioning units also will help reduce noise problems in classrooms.

The project, which is being designed, will be done in phases, with buildings A, B and D being the first to get the new air-conditioning systems.

"We're very grateful," Kama said. "The children get so hot."

Kihei School Principal Alvin Shima said the air-conditioning project has been in its design

phase for a couple of years.

"For some reason, it takes a while for things to happen," he said. "We're still waiting on the final design of the system."

Shima acknowledged that those designing the system have been working diligently, but they've faced challenges in working out the system.

For example, challenges have involved figuring out how to keep classrooms airtight, and how to install the system in a busy school without disrupting instruction for students, he said.

An earlier design of a duct system would have demanded "very intensive work," he said. But now the design is moving toward split-system air conditioning, which would be less labor-intensive and require less construction, according to Shima.

Ideally, construction would happen during summer months when school is not in session. But, because the project is expected to take several months for installation, "we'll need to work around instructional times," Shima said.

Kihei School has almost 900 students, and classrooms are full, he said.

That means teachers and staff will need to find "creative ways" to work around installation of the air conditioning, Shima said. "We have no choice."

Design work for the entire school's air-conditioning system is scheduled to be completed in January, said Russ Saito, comptroller for the state Department of Accounting and General Services, which is responsible for capital improvement projects in public schools.

After that, the bidding process to find a contractor would take a couple of months, Saito said.

Construction of the first phase could start then and be completed by March or April 2007, he said. Work on the second phase should go faster because its design would be ready to go.

The cost of installing the second phase of air conditioning for the school has not been determined, Saito said.

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